

**The Myth of Colorblind Reporting:
The Rhetoric of Racial Stereotyping in News Coverage of Athletes
Accused of Crimes**

**By
Evin B. Luongo**

**A Senior Honors Thesis Submitted to the
Department of Communication
of Boston College**

May 2009

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION	
ABSTRACT	
CHAPTER ONE	
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO	
A REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	5
<i>Studies of Sports and Crime.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>The Law and Sports.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Communication Research on Crime and Athletics.....</i>	<i>9</i>
CHAPTER THREE	
METHODOLOGY.....	13
CHAPTER FOUR	
TYSON: THE TATTOOED TERROR.....	15
<i>A Boxer Brutalized by the Media.....</i>	<i>17</i>
CHAPTER FIVE	
VICK: FROM TOP DOG TO JUNKYARD DOG.....	23
<i>Villainizing Vick in the Press.....</i>	<i>27</i>
CHAPTER SIX	
BRYANT: “ROOM SERVICE, PLEASE!”.....	32
<i>Kobe’s Comeback: It Began With the Press.....</i>	<i>36</i>
CHAPTER SEVEN	
CONCLUSION.....	42
APPENDIX A	
MIKE TYSON KEYWORD LIST.....	48
APPENDIX B	
MICHAEL VICK KEYWORD LIST.....	49
APPENDIX C	
KOBE BRYANT KEYWORD LIST.....	51
REFERENCES.....	53
SUPPLEMENTAL SOURCES.....	58

DEDICATION

To my parents:

Thank you for all of the opportunities you have provided me with in order to succeed.

To Dr. Bonnie S. Jefferson:

Thank you for your unwavering support, and believing that I could do this.

ABSTRACT

Crime is pervasive in all of sports, and is a disturbing trend that cannot be ignored. This paper focuses on three athletes accused of committing crimes—Mike Tyson, Michael Vick, and Kobe Bryant—and how they are portrayed by the media. Utilizing the methodology provided by David J. Leonard in his 2004 article entitled “The Next M.J. or the Next O.J.? Kobe Bryant, Race, and the Absurdity of Colorblind Rhetoric,” this paper demonstrates how the media is incapable of viewing athletes accused of crimes through a “colorblind lens.” As a result, the media relies on traditional stereotypes to categorize African American males accused of breaking the law. In examining the press coverage of these three athletes, it becomes evident that the media sees Bryant much differently than it sees both Tyson and Vick. While Mike Tyson and Michael Vick are described using traditional stereotypical terminology, Kobe Bryant is described using terms often reserved for Caucasians.

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

In the year 2009, some athletes are more than just individuals trained to compete in sports—they are drug abusers, kidnappers, rapists, and murderers. Violence amongst athletes is a trend that continues to grow, and there is sufficient evidence to support this disturbing tendency. According to published reports, “a new incident of athlete crime emerges once every two days” (Valen, 2009). The prevalence of violence in sports is simply undeniable, and it is not just manifest in the professional realm. In a study conducted at thirty major Division I universities, it was determined that athletes commit one in three sexual assaults. Although male athletes comprise merely 3.3% of the college population, they commit 19% of the sexual assaults (Valen, 2009). Unfortunately, criminal activity does not decrease when football players make the transition from college to the NFL; the National Coalition Against Violent Athletes (NCAVA) reports that one in five NFL players have been charged with a crime (“Game Stats,” 2006).

In an article entitled: “Is Jock Culture a Training Ground for Crime,” Jake Tapper and Audrey Taylor attempt to uncover why athletes are becoming involved in illicit behavior. The article suggests that there is a problem of “athletes whose attitude includes a sense of entitlement that manifests itself in crude and even lawless behavior” (2006, para. 3). There are others who suggest that the inherent nature of athletic competition may give rise to athletes committing crime. Aggression and winning at all costs may contribute to sports stars finding it acceptable to break the law. On the other hand, sports apologists argue that it is a fallacy to state that crimes committed by athletes are on the rise, claiming that “it only ‘seems’ like athletes

commit more crimes because they are widely publicized due to the athlete's fame" (Valen, 2009, para. 3). Although it may be true that athletes and their personal lives are often thrust into the limelight, it does not have any bearing on the fact that today's sports stars are engaging in more criminal behavior than in the past.

Orenthal James "O.J." Simpson is one of the most notorious athletes in the world of sports who has been charged with a crime. In 1994, the retired football legend was brought to trial for the murder of his ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend, Ronald Goldman. Although Simpson was acquitted of the murder charges in 1995, there were a multitude of people who did not feel as though O.J. was innocent. Statistical data revealed that there was a strong correlation between one's race and whether one perceived Simpson to be guilty or not. According to poll results, Whites believed that O.J. was guilty of committing the murders, whereas African Americans believed that he was innocent. In a 1995 Gallup Poll, 639 adult Americans were interviewed and were asked questions regarding the O.J. Simpson verdict. While 78% of Blacks thought that the verdict was correct, only 42% of Whites believed that O.J. was innocent ("The O.J. Simpson trial," 1995). While some may argue that it is a mere coincidence for the statistics to break down along racial lines, recent evidence dispels this theory. In a 2004 NBC News poll—conducted ten years after the original verdict was handed down—71% of Blacks thought that O.J. Simpson was not responsible for the murders of Nicole Brown and Ron Goldman. In that same poll, however, only 13% of Whites thought that Simpson was innocent ("NBC News Poll," 2004). In examining the opinions of the American public, it

becomes clear that there is a strong correlation between race and perceptions of guilt or innocence in the O.J. Simpson murder case.

In addition to O.J. Simpson, there have been a myriad of other professional athletes accused of committing crimes. In the world of football, Carolina Panther Rae Carruth was sentenced to twenty-four years in prison for conspiracy to commit murder. In baseball, the all-time Major League leader in hits—Pete Rose—was sentenced to five months in prison for tax evasion. Basketball has also had its share of accused criminals, as former Atlanta Hawk Tom Payne was sentenced to life in prison for rape. Even in the more obscure sports, there have been athletes who have broken the law: Tonya Harding was a figure skater who was sentenced to three months probation for hindering a police investigation; skateboarder Mark Rogowski was found guilty of rape and murder, and was sentenced to thirty-one years in prison; and Olympic diver Bruce Kimball was convicted on vehicular homicide charges, and was sentenced to seventeen years in jail. In examining the pervasiveness of crime in the world of sports alone, it becomes clear that crime is a universal feature of our society.

This study will focus on three prominent athletes in the world of sports who have been accused of committing crimes: Mike Tyson, Michael Vick, and Kobe Bryant. Prior to examining these individual cases, this paper will review the work of many scholars who have investigated crime and its infiltration into the sports culture. Chapter Three previews the methodology that will be utilized in order to analyze the media coverage of athletes accused of crimes. Chapter Four provides a brief history of Mike Tyson, along with an analysis of the press coverage he received during the

midst of his rape trial. Chapter Five focuses on the history of Michael Vick, followed by an analysis of the press coverage he received after being accused of participating in illegal dogfighting. Chapter Six offers a brief history of Kobe Bryant, followed by an analysis of the media coverage he received after being charged with sexual assault. Finally, Chapter Seven is the concluding chapter to the thesis.

Chapter Two A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There have been a multitude of scholars in a variety of fields that have studied athletes and their involvement in criminal activity. Whether it is in the realm of sports psychology, law, or communication, researchers have worked towards gaining a greater understanding of sports stars that break the law.

Studies of Sports and Crime

In the area of sports psychology, we encounter research that argues that there is a trend of increased violence in athletics. In an article entitled “Strategies for Reducing Criminal Violence Among Athletes,” Donald Staffo focuses on the prevalence of criminal violence in the personal lives of athletes, and suggests strategies for reducing that violence (2001). The National Football League (NFL) is offered as an example of a professional sports league that is plagued by crime. During the 1999 season alone, two NFL players were charged with murder; six players were charged with either sexual or physical assault and/or battery; one player was arrested on drugs and weapons charges; and one player was arrested for breaking and entering with the intent to harm (2001). Staffo argues that while aggressive, violent behavior may be tolerated within the realm of sports, criminal conduct off of the field is simply unacceptable. He also notes that criminal behavior is not restricted merely to professional athletes. Collegiate and high school athletes are becoming more involved in illegal behavior, and the trend is not going to reverse itself, Staffo says. Instead, teachers, physical educators, and coaches must take an active role in becoming more involved in the lives of student-athletes. Whether it is in becoming

more aware of warning signs, or adjusting their instructional styles, teachers and coaches need to do their part in ensuring juveniles do not turn to a life of a crime.

David Leonard's article, "The Next M.J. or the Next O.J.? Kobe Bryant, Race, and the Absurdity of Colorblind Rhetoric," investigates the issue of racial discrimination in sports, employing Kobe Bryant's 2003 rape trial as an example (2004). The article "explores the ways in which race is conceived, constructed, employed, and deployed through the coverage and societal conversations about Kobe Bryant" (2004, p. 285). Although the dominant hegemonic ideology eliminates race as a factor in the discussion of Bryant's rape allegations, Leonard reveals that race *does* play a significant role. The author explains that colorblind rhetoric is a mere creation of the mind, and that race plays a pivotal role in how we evaluate Kobe Bryant during his rape trial. Although "colorblind rhetoric" allows White nationalists to escape being labeled as racists or bigots, it does not reflect the reality of the situation. Although 95% of sexual crimes in this country are committed by White men, only 25% of the aggregate prison population is Caucasian (2004). In a poll conducted by USA Today, 40% of Whites assumed Kobe Bryant to be guilty of rape, before any of the facts in the case had emerged (2004). Leonard argues that these significant figures are not reflective of a colorblind society; instead, the American public has a tendency to prejudge those individuals who pass through the court system. David Leonard's research reveals the absurdity of the notion of colorblind rhetoric, and exposes the truth regarding how we perceive African Americans accused of committing crimes.

The Law and Sports

While scholars who work in sports psychology focus on the prevalence of crime in sports, research in the law area examines the legal ramifications of the problem. Although violence in modern-day sports is an epidemic that must be curtailed, Laurie Robinson argues that athletes are not given a fair opportunity to prove their innocence when it comes to court proceedings. In her article, “Professional Athletes—Held to a Higher Standard and Above the Law: A Comment on High-Profile Criminal Defendants and the Need for States to Establish High-Profile Courts,” the author contends that high-profile defendants often find themselves subject to increased scrutiny due to their celebrity status, which can prevent them from receiving a fair trial (1997). Robinson suggests that there be the creation of a special court system, in order to “balance the scales of justice for high-profile defendants” (1997, p. 1339). The author claims that high-status individuals, such as professional athletes, “believe their notoriety and visibility might impair their right to a fair trial” (p. 1314). As a result, Robinson lobbies for the creation of special state courts that are reserved for adjudicating high-profile cases. In these specially devised state courts, jurors will be able to hear a case without being influenced by the seemingly incessant amount of media coverage that surrounds prestigious individuals. Robinson suggests that professional athletes are entitled to due process within the legal system, and “it is unfair for a high-profile defendant’s life, liberty, and opportunity to obtain fair treatment to be predicated on the media’s agenda of selling newspapers, expanding circulation, or conquering Nielson ratings” (p. 1350). The

goal of the United States justice system is to provide fair treatment to everyone, regardless of age, race, gender, occupation, or socioeconomic background.

Michael O’Hear, a professor at Marquette Law School, elaborates on the notion of sentencing athletes who have committed crime in “Symposium: Blue-Collar Crimes/White-Collar Criminals: Sentencing Elite Athletes Who Commit Violent Crimes” (2001). The article addresses the issue of whether or not prominent professional athletes who have committed crimes should be sentenced differently than other violent criminals. Criminal activity in the world of sports is widespread—from Mike Tyson in boxing, to Rae Carruth in football, to Jason Kidd in basketball, and to Marty McSorley in hockey (2001). The author cites an alarming study conducted by Jeff Benedict and Don Yaeger, where the researchers studied the pervasiveness of crime in the National Football League (NFL). In reviewing the state criminal history records of 509 NFL players during the 1996-1997 season, Benedict and Yaeger found that 109 of those players (21%) had been arrested or indicted for at least one “serious” offense (2001). Today, the dominant trend is for athletes to be treated by the courts with unwarranted disparity, which involves “treating similarly situated defendants in a dissimilar manner” (2001). However, critics argue that elite athletes who commit crime should be held *more* accountable for their actions. The three main reasons critics suggest for this increased accountability include: enhanced culpability, enhanced deterrence value, and employment consequences (2001). Whether the courts should treat athletes who violate the law in a strict or lenient manner is clearly up for debate; what cannot be argued, however, is the fact that “sports pages are increasingly coming to resemble police blotters” (2001, para. 1).

Communication Research on Crime and Athletics

While many researchers in other disciplines focus solely on the frequency of crime in today's sports society, communication scholars take a more holistic approach. In "Once Sports Gave us Heroes, not Heartaches and Head Cases," James Brady argues that crime in athletics has not always been such a dominant theme (1997). Brady, in comparing professional athletics as they exist presently and in the past, suggests that there has been a complete loss of integrity in the realm of sports. Yesterday's athletes, including the likes of Joe Dimaggio, Ted Williams, Joe Louis, and John McEnroe, were American icons and heroes for the plethora of people who followed their careers. Today's sports stars, however, are far from icons or heroes. Instead, these individuals have successfully dishonored and disgraced professional sports by engaging in illicit conduct. "The game goes on but nothing is the same," Brady argues, for heroes have transformed into head cases (1997, para. 2).

While criminal activity has increased in contemporary sports, Richard Lapchick suggests that African Americans are being unfairly blamed for this proliferation. "Crime and Athletes: New Racial Stereotypes" discusses how racism is an ill that continues to infect our society, as it permeates the realm of professional athletics (2000). As Lapchick's article illuminates, African Americans make up the majority of the most commonly watched sports: 77% of the NBA; 65% of the NFL; 57% of NCAA Division I basketball; and 47% of NCAA Division IA football (2000, p. 14). There is a prevailing stereotype that playing a sport makes athletes more gender violent than those individuals who do not play a sport (p. 14). Inherent in that statement is that African Americans, in particular, are gender violent, due to their

majority presence in the sports world. Former Syracuse University quarterback Don McPherson said: “When the public talks about gender violence and athletes, it talks Black. No one discusses the problems of golfer John Daly or Braves manager Bobby Cox” (p. 19). The reality of the situation, as Lapchick’s research points out, is that athletes—and Black athletes, in particular—are no more likely to engage in gender violence than individuals of other races and occupations. Gender violence cannot be pinned to one particular set of demographics; instead, it is an issue that affects people from all different backgrounds.

In another communication study on athletes and crime, Samuel Terilli, Sigman Splichal, and Paul Driscoll examine the Kobe Bryant case, and how lawyers for both the prosecution and the defense compromised court proceedings. “Lowering the Bar: Privileged Court Filings as Substitutes for Press Releases in the Court of Public Opinion” is an article that focuses on the issue of “public relations litigation,” where the authors argue that lawyers engage in the process of filing pleadings in order “to attract media attention and try cases in the court of public opinion” (2007, p. 2). In the civil case involving professional basketball player Kobe Bryant, Judge Matsch rebuked counsel for engaging in the process of public relations litigation; and consequently sealed the court file in order to prevent any further damage from being done. A lawyer will practice public relations litigation either to defame the opposing party, or to garner positive publicity for his or her own client (2007). The article highlights the fact that pleadings that also function as press releases are not inherently controversial; however, when pleadings function *solely* as press releases, then the court has a moral and legal obligation to take action. Furthermore, as exemplified in

the Kobe Bryant civil case, the court has the ability to detect and prevent public relations litigation from taking place during a trial.

In her 2004 article entitled “When Heroes Go Bad: The Co-Dependence of Mike Tyson and the Press,” Shari Waxman analyzes the media’s fascination with the heavyweight Tyson. Mike Tyson has led a tumultuous life, both inside and outside of the boxing ring. Throughout the course of his professional career, Tyson has achieved great success—including becoming the youngest-ever heavyweight champion at age twenty. However, Tyson had a pattern of criminal behavior; including a rape conviction, a prison sentence, and a multitude of other violent incidents. Although they may try, Waxman argues that the media cannot stop covering this prize fighter: “The media’s co-dependent relationship with Tyson has not gone unnoticed. In 1999, Lipsyte, for *The New York Times*, “contrasted our simplistic condemnation of Tyson with our absolute deification of the other Mike” (p. 62). While some tabloid reporters, like Katherine Dunn of *PDXS* in Oregon, label Tyson as “dirty, disgusting, repellent, bestial, loathsome, vile, animalistic, vampiristic, deranged, maniacal, cannibalistic, murderous, and cowardly,” others in the media view him as the greatest athlete on earth (p. 62). Regardless of these differences of opinion, the media continues to cover Mike Tyson because he is always bound to give them a good story—which is exactly what reporters are after.

Media coverage of athletes who have committed crime is not merely restricted to the United States, as is exemplified in the Mike Tyson rape case. Jim McKay and Phillip Smith, in their “Exonerating the Hero: Frames and Narratives in Media Coverage of the O.J. Simpson Story,” examine Australian media coverage of the

arrest of former professional football player O.J. Simpson, after he is charged with committing murder. The authors use content analysis to study television coverage, newspaper coverage, and magazine coverage of Simpson's arrest. The researchers conclude that "the Simpson story was framed in three main ways: as the rise and fall of an American hero; as an event produced by, and typical of, Hollywood and Los Angeles; and as a media feeding frenzy" (1995). Due to these frames, O.J. Simpson's image as an American icon and sports legend was able to remain intact, and he was able to escape being stigmatized by society.

Chapter Three METHODOLOGY

In David J. Leonard's "The Next M.J. or the Next O.J.? Kobe Bryant, Race, and the Absurdity of Colorblind Rhetoric," the author explains that people use a racial lens in order to interpret their daily lives (2004). Leonard posits that the notion of "colorblind rhetoric" is a mere figment of the collective American imagination, stating that race plays a key role in how we view individuals: "The deployment of colorblind language and emphasis of 'not seeing any color' does not reflect American reality in that 'racial considerations shade almost everything in America'" (p. 287). Race is "embedded within all public discourses", Leonard states, and it becomes a frame that individuals utilize in order to make sense of the world around them (p. 292).

David Leonard writes about the many ways in which African American athletes are stereotyped in the media, including: African Americans as "hypersexual brutes"; African Americans as "rapists"; African Americans as "irresponsible"; African Americans as "unremorseful"; and African Americans as "crude" (2004).

In addition to the factors that Leonard discusses in his article, this study has revealed that there are other ways in which African Americans are portrayed by the media. The media characterizes African Americans as "uneducated," "cooperative," "fine young men," "physically attractive," "accomplished," and "vindicated."

In examining the media coverage of Mike Tyson, Michael Vick, and Kobe Bryant, it becomes clear that the media relies on racial stereotypes to inform their opinions regarding these athletes. The language that the media uses to describe these three professional athletes accused of committing crimes highlights the "centrality of

race...in the condemnation of contemporary Black athletes” (p. 286). The media sees both Tyson and Vick as Black criminals, who have transgressed the law and deserve to be punished. Contrastingly, Kobe Bryant is seen as a White man, and is not assigned the same negative and racially infused labels that are reserved for Blacks. David Leonard’s colorblind rhetoric will serve as the methodological framework that this paper will use to examine the individual cases of Mike Tyson, Michael Vick, and Kobe Bryant.

Chapter Four

TYSON: THE TATTOOED TERROR

One of the most notorious criminals in the world of sports is, ironically, one of the greatest boxers to have ever stepped into the ring: Mike Tyson. Tyson was born into a crime-infested Brooklyn neighborhood, where he was exposed to violence at an early age. Although Tyson never knew his biological father, he was forced to witness his mother's boyfriend physically and emotionally abuse her ("Mike Tyson Biography," n.d.). Tyson emulated the behavior of the adults who were present in his life, and began to commit petty crimes when he was a young boy. Picking pockets, mugging people, and robbing stores at gunpoint were among Tyson's specialties ("Mike Tyson Biography," n.d.). By the time Mike Tyson was thirteen years old, he had been arrested thirty-eight times (Gianoulis, n.d.). The court classified Tyson as a juvenile delinquent, and he was sent to the Tyron School for Boys in Catskill, New York—which was a reform school (Gianoulis, n.d.).

It was at the Tyron School for Boys that Mike Tyson met Cus D'Amato, who introduced the troubled teenager to the world of boxing. D'Amato became Tyson's legal guardian, and transformed him from a criminal into a celebrity. In 1986, at the age of twenty, Mike Tyson became the youngest heavyweight champion in the history of boxing ("Mike Tyson Biography", n.d.). Tyson legitimized his place in the world of boxing by knocking out Trevor Berbick in just the second round of the fight. Mike Tyson's professional boxing career afforded him a great deal of acclaim and monetary reward. He obtained almost instant wealth after entering the sport, and earned more than seventy-five million dollars in 1996 alone ("Mike Tyson Biography," n.d.). From 1985 until 1990, Mike Tyson won every single fight he

entered—he was a God amongst mortals (Gianoulis, n.d.). In the world of boxing, Mike Tyson was one of the most disciplined and composed individuals on the planet. He was a fearless competitor, who relied on his physical strength and emotional vigor in order to achieve victory.

However, Mike Tyson’s professional life stood in stark contrast to his personal life. Inside the ring, Tyson was a hard-hitting heavyweight, who decimated a great majority of the opponents he faced. Outside of the ring, however, Mike Tyson was a disturbed individual who often found himself in trouble with the law. Tyson’s criminal record is an extensive one—from purse snatchings to charges of assault, battery, drag racing, and disorderly conduct. Tyson’s rap sheet is a twenty-seven item list of offenses that begins in 1978 and ends in 2007 (“Mike Tyson rap sheet,” 2007). Although Tyson was able to demonstrate poise and restraint during his boxing matches, he was unable to moderate his behavior in the real world.

In 1992, Mike Tyson was charged with and found guilty of raping Desiree Washington, who was a contestant in the Miss Black America pageant in July of 1991 (“Mike Tyson Biography,” n.d.). After forcing sexual intercourse on the eighteen-year-old woman in an Indianapolis hotel room on July 18, 1991, Tyson was convicted on one count of rape and two counts of deviate sexual conduct (“Mike Tyson rap sheet,” 2007). Although Tyson was accustomed to punishing his opponents, he was now the one being punished—sentenced to six years in prison, followed by four years of probation (“Indiana court upholds,” 1993). Mike Tyson ended up serving three years at the Indiana Youth Center, and was released from jail in 1995.

Mike Tyson is one of the most decorated boxers to have ever competed in the sport. During his professional career, Tyson was a five foot ten inch, two hundred thirty-nine pound intimidator who refused to accept defeat. For Mike Tyson, however, the line between professional boxing and everyday life often became blurred. Instead of acting like an upstanding citizen, Tyson would often revert to engaging in illicit behavior outside of the ring. Mike Tyson was once quoted as saying: “I just want to conquer people and their souls” (“Mike Tyson Quotes,” n.d.). And, in July of 1991, Tyson was able to conquer the young and vulnerable Desiree Washington. Mike Tyson is a mentally unstable individual who believes that “America wasn’t built on moral fiber...this country was built on rape, slavery, murder, degradation and affiliation with crime” (“Mike Tyson Quotes,” n.d.). Operating with this mentality, it is not surprising that Mike Tyson has constantly been involved in criminal activity since his early youth.

In conducting research on Mike Tyson, I utilized the LexisNexis Academic search engine in order to obtain articles. I performed a general search within major U.S. and world publications using the terms “Mike Tyson rape trial,” and was provided with 1,000 results. My next step was to look at the titles of the articles, in order to try and narrow down my research to the most pertinent artifacts. I ended up selecting 27 articles relating to the Mike Tyson rape trial, and examined these artifacts applying David Leonard’s methodology.

A Boxer Brutalized by the Media

This paper will transition to looking at Mike Tyson from a rhetorical perspective, by examining the press coverage surrounding his rape trial.

There are a plethora of stereotypes assigned to African Americans in David Leonard's article, one which is that they are "hypersexual brutes" (2004, p. 296). In the article, Leonard is contrasting these hypersexual brutes next to helpless White girls in order to "demonize Black male bodies" (p. 296). A hypersexual brute is an individual who is so excessively interested in sex, that their behavior resembles that of a predatory beast. In the media coverage surrounding Mike Tyson, this stereotype of a hypersexual brute emerges. During a September 11, 1991 CBS Evening News show, host Dan Rather informed the audience that Tyson was formally being charged with rape. Richard Schlesinger, a reporter assigned to the story, commented on Tyson's act, calling it "primitive behavior" (Schlesinger, 1991, para. 5). Using the word "primitive" to describe the behavior of Tyson indicates that the media thinks of him as subhuman—for no self-respecting, moral human being could be capable of raping an innocent woman. "Primitive" is a word with an inherently negative connotation, and refers to someone who is crude and belongs to an early stage of civilization. It is a good example of the "hypersexual brute" stereotype mentioned in David Leonard's article, as both terms are relegating Tyson to subhuman status. Only a hypersexual animal could commit such an atrocious crime as the rape of a teenage girl. Tyson is described using terms traditionally reserved for animals—"brute" and "primitive" are ways in which we describe apes, not human beings.

Another stereotype that is revealed in David Leonard's article is the "myth of the Black rapist" (2004, p. 294). According to Leonard, there is a stereotype that brands "most Black men as the 'rapist type'" (p. 295). This statement reveals that African American males are typically associated with a life of crime, particularly

involving the rape of innocent White females. In an article entitled “Tyson talking hate rape—Says he’d like to attack beauty queen and mom,” Mike Tyson reaffirms the prevailing notion that African American males are rapists: “Anybody else having fun like that, it’s young boys having fun...but it’s me, I’m a big Black rapist...that’s the stigma I’m left with” (Siemaszko, 2003, para. 4). Mike Tyson’s own statements indicate that he is not blind to the fact that the dominant White mentality in our society tends to associate rape with Black men.

David Leonard’s exposé on colorblind rhetoric draws attention to the fact that African American males are typically viewed as “irresponsible” individuals (2004, p. 298). Leonard argues that the image of Black men as irresponsible is a stereotype that is pervasive in press coverage. This stereotype manifests itself in much of the media coverage surrounding Mike Tyson, as he is deemed to be “unremorseful.” A responsible person would accept the consequences for committing a crime, but Mike Tyson does not accept responsibility. Instead, Tyson is described as a cold, bitter, and unremorseful convict who does not believe in repenting for his sins. In a 1992 article published in *The Toronto Star*, Tyson is described as being “unremorseful to the end” (“Mike Tyson jailed,” 1992, para. 1). Similarly, in a 1994 CNN News broadcast, it is revealed that when prosecutors asked Mike Tyson if he felt any remorse for raping Desiree Washington, he said “no” (“Mike Tyson’s Appeal,” 1994, para. 6). Finally, in an article called “I’m not sorry, says Tyson, the rapist,” the boxer adamantly stands by his story, declaring his innocence and failing to take responsibility for the rape. All of these examples portraying Mike Tyson as

unremorseful are typical of Leonard's concept of the Black rapist—an irresponsible felon incapable of being accountable for his actions.

One of the ways David Leonard suggests we traditionally describe Black men is by labeling them as “crass” individuals. To be crass means to be crude, or unrefined. Leonard suggests that African American males who rape are crass, when he refers to them using words like “base” “wildness,” “unbridled” and “uncontrolled” (2004). In a 1992 article published in *The Toronto Star*, Mike Tyson “apologized for his ‘crass’ behavior (para. 6). In *The Washington Post*, Tyson is described as someone who is “disrespectful with a crude attitude toward women” (1992, para. 7). Finally, Jon Saraceno depicts Mike Tyson in a *USA TODAY* article as “a crude individual with a penchant for vulgar language and crass behavior toward women” (1992, para. 1). Throughout the media coverage of Mike Tyson and his rape trial, it becomes evident that Tyson is being portrayed as someone who is devoid of any refinement.

Another image that Leonard mentions is that Blacks are stereotypically thought of as “threatening” individuals, capable of harming innocent Whites (2004, p. 298). In a *USA TODAY* article called “Tyson convicted on all counts,” Mike Tyson is described as being an “intimidating force,” not to be reckoned with (1992, para. 4). Similarly, in an article published in *The Washington Post*, Tyson is characterized as exhibiting “ruthless...lewd, obscene, and disrespectful behavior toward women” (1992, para. 2). Often referred to as “Iron Mike” and “The Baddest Man on the Planet,” Mike Tyson is a powerful man who is able to instill fear.

In addition to concepts Leonard specifically discusses in his article, this analysis of press coverage of Mike Tyson reveals additional negative stereotypes. For example, Tyson is described as being an uneducated person. In the media coverage of Mike Tyson and his rape trial, he is often depicted as being intellectually challenged. In an article called “Tyson guilty on all counts,” Vincent Fuller, Tyson’s lead counsel, portrayed Tyson as “intellectually limited and immature” (Saraceno, 1992, para. 10). It is interesting to note that even Mike Tyson’s own defense team was depicting their client in a negative light, fitting him into the mold of the typical “ignorant Black man.” In another *USA TODAY* article, entitled “Boxer says he made intentions known,” Tyson’s defense team tried once again to characterize Tyson as incompetent: “The picture of Mike Tyson painted by his attorneys during his rape trial is a surreal portrait...of an uneducated ring waif” (Saraceno, 1992, para. 1). Tyson’s lack of education is a frequent theme in the press coverage analyzed in this study.

In delineating African American men in society, David Leonard notes that there are classical stereotypes about appearance (2004, p. 301). Black men who have tattoos are defined as rebellious, intimidating thugs who degrade themselves by permanently tainting their skin. In the media coverage of Mike Tyson, this stereotype is often observed. In a 2003 article published by the *New York Daily News*, staff writer Corky Siemaszko calls Tyson “a tattooed terror” (para. 2). In pairing the words “tattoo” and “terror” together, it becomes clear that the writer associates body ink with criminal activity and deviant misconduct. Press references to appearance

inevitably stigmatize Black men as criminals—regardless of whether or not they are law-abiding citizens.

In his 2004 article, David Leonard focuses his efforts on revealing racial stereotypes in press coverage. As Leonard discusses at length, “Black male bodies have come to represent that which is deviant, criminal and threatening...Blackness represents a sign of decay, disorder, and danger” (p. 298). These stereotypes are confirmed in the press coverage of Mike Tyson surveyed in this study. Mike Tyson is portrayed by the media to be a ruthless thug who has exemplified savage behavior. Although Tyson was guaranteed a fair trial by the Sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution, he was labeled as guilty by the press coverage of his case. Due to the color of his skin, Mike Tyson was defined through a stereotypical lens that is used to describe African American males who are accused of committing crimes.

Chapter Five

VICK: FROM TOP DOG TO JUNKYARD DOG

Michael Dwayne Vick was born on June 26, 1980, in Newport News, Virginia. Although Michael grew up in a troubled neighborhood, his mother did not allow him to become distracted by the crime that plagued Newport News. At an early age, Vick developed an affinity for the game of football. Under the tutelage of his father, Vick learned how to throw the football with pinpoint accuracy and precision. Michael's elder cousin, Aaron Brooks, was a successful NFL quarterback who served as a mentor for the young and talented Vick ("Michael Vick Biography", 2008). In 1996, Michael Vick entered Warwick High School and excelled at the Junior Varsity level—throwing twenty touchdown passes in just his first six games ("Michael Vick Biography", 2008). Heading into his senior season, Vick was named as a pre-season All-America by both *SuperPrep* and *PrepStar* ("Michael Vick Biography", 2008). In his four seasons playing football at Warwick, Vick passed for 4,846 yards, ran for 1,048 yards, and threw 18 touchdown passes ("Michael Vick Biography", 2008). Vick's speed, strength, agility, and signal calling abilities enabled him to become one of the top college recruits in the nation, with Syracuse University and Virginia Tech University as the top two suitors vying for his services ("Michael Vick Biography", 2008).

Michael Vick chose to attend Virginia Tech University, which offered the young phenom a full scholarship to play football. During his first year as a Hokie, Vick helped the team finish the season with a 9-3 record, while trouncing Alabama 38-7 in the Music City Bowl ("Michael Vick Biography", 2008). In his freshman season, Vick passed for 1,840 yards and 12 touchdowns, while running for 585 yards

(“Michael Vick Biography”, 2008). In that same year, Michael Vick was named First Team All-America by *The Sporting News*, in addition to becoming the Big East’s Offensive Player of the Year. Vick also finished third in the race for the Heisman Trophy—only the third freshman in collegiate football history to place that high in the voting (“Michael Vick Biography”). Vick continued to impress his fellow teammates, coaches, fans, and scouts during his sophomore stint at Virginia Tech, and decided to enter into the NFL draft in 2001—when it became clear that he would be a Top 5 draft pick. And, with the number one selection in the 2001 NFL draft, the Atlanta Falcons selected Michael Vick.

Michael Vick signed a professional contract with the Atlanta Falcons, worth sixty-two million dollars over a six year span; Vick also received an additional fifteen million dollars in guaranteed money with a signing bonus (“Michael Vick Biography”, 2008). When Atlanta starting quarterback Chris Chandler went down with an injury in the middle of the 2001 season, Michael Vick had the opportunity to prove that he was worthy of his lucrative contract. Vick did not disappoint, as he began to amass quarterback rushing numbers that were unparalleled at the position. The young quarterback was also impressive with his arm, going longer than any other quarterback in 2002 before throwing his first interception (“Michael Vick Biography”, 2008). Over the course of his next five seasons in the NFL, Vick continued to live up to the expectations that had been set for him. In addition to leading the Falcons to the playoffs in 2004, Michael Vick was named to the Pro-Bowl in both 2004 and 2006; in 2004, he set an NFL postseason record for a quarterback with 119 rushing yards in a NFC Divisional Playoff win against the St. Louis Rams;

and in 2006, he became the only quarterback in NFL history to rush for over 1,000 yards during the regular season. However, Vick's many accomplishments would be overshadowed by his encounter with the law, and the multimillion dollar football player would soon find himself unemployed and behind bars.

In 2006, Michael Vick came under suspicion for engaging in illegal dogfighting activities. As authorities investigated Vick and examined his property, they discovered that one of the NFL's most popular players was, in fact, participating in the illicit activity. In fact, since 2001, a group known as Bad Newz Kennels had operated on Vick's Atlanta property ("Michael Vick Biography", 2008). Vick became implicated "in everything from wagering on matches to approving the disposal of dogs that lost" ("Michael Vick Biography", 2008). The NFL immediately responded by suspending the Atlanta quarterback—but being prohibited from playing football was the least of the troubled athlete's worries. Michael Vick needed to prove to authorities that he was not involved in acts of animal cruelty in order to secure his future freedom. However, in the fall of 2007, Vick was convicted on a felony count of "Conspiracy to Travel in Interstate Commerce in Aid of Unlawful Activities and to Sponsor a Dog in an Animal Fighting Venture." This charge carried with it a potential sentence of up to five years in prison and a \$25,000 dollar fine. As a sentence for his reprehensible behavior, Michael Vick received twenty-three months in prison and three years of probation following his release. Furthermore, Vick lost endorsement deals with Nike, Coca-Cola, EA Sports, Kraft Foods, Hasbro, and AirTran following the incident. According to an article published by MSNBC in July of 2007, "not since NBA sharpshooter Kobe Bryant hemorrhaged endorsement

dollars amid 2003 rape allegations has a high-profile athlete faced such a financial fiasco” (Briggs, 2007, para. 11). Scheduled to be released on July 20, 2009, Michael Vick is currently serving time in federal prison—but hopes to be granted permission to finish out his sentence under home confinement.

In 2001, Michael Vick was one of the NFL’s most popular players—in 2007, he was sentenced to over two years in federal prison for killing dogs (“Michael Vick Biography”, 2008). In participating in illegal dog-fighting, Vick not only relinquished a position in the NFL, but surrendered his freedom as an American citizen. Since pleading guilty to dogfighting charges, Vick has been attacked by more than just the U.S. court system—creditors have come after the troubled NFL player in search of money owed to them, and the once millionaire athlete was forced to file for personal reorganization bankruptcy in July of 2008. It is difficult to speculate on how Michael Vick will respond to everything that has happened to him upon his release. The questions regarding whether or not this fallen NFL star will successfully be able to revive his career cannot be answered until the summer of 2009, when Michael Vick is scheduled to become a free man.

Similar to the Mike Tyson case, I utilized the LexisNexis Academic database in order to retrieve articles pertinent to the Michael Vick dogfighting scandal. I conducted a general search within major U.S. and world publications, but did not specify any dates. Using the keywords “Michael Vick dogfighting,” I was provided with 980 results pertinent to my topic. I randomly surveyed article titles in order to select the artifacts that appeared to be most relevant to the case involving Michael Vick. In the end, 22 articles were selected for examination.

Villainizing Vick in the Press

This paper will now focus on analyzing the media coverage of Michael Vick, and how the press depicted him after Vick was indicted on criminal dogfighting charges.

In “The Next M.J. or the Next O.J.? Kobe Bryant, Race, and the Absurdity of Colorblind Rhetoric,” David Leonard explains how African Americans are often stereotyped as being primitive animals. While Mike Tyson is portrayed by the media as being a “brute,” Michael Vick is described in a similar manner. In an article called “Fallen Falcon Vick pleads guilty, apologizes; ‘Dogfighting is a terrible thing and I do reject it. I will redeem myself. I have to,’ disgraced QB says,” president of the U.S. Humane Society Wayne Pacelle characterizes Vick’s behavior as subhuman. “Dogfighting is not a benign hobby, but a sickening, barbaric and criminal action,” Pacelle explains (Fiske, 2007, para. 12). To engage in the despicable and reprehensible act of dogfighting, Pacelle says, is to engage in uncivilized and animalistic behavior.

In a *USA TODAY* article published in August of 2007, Michael Vick is also depicted using adjectives typically reserved for animals: “An individual who tortures and slaughters domestic animals is a savage,” the article suggests (“It would be criminal,” 2007, para. 2). The article says that those people who engage in the sport of dogfighting are “menaces” who exhibit “brutality” towards animals (“It would be criminal,” 2007, para. 2). Michael Vick is also described as “subhuman” in this article; for no self-respecting and dignified human being would have the capacity to become involved in such a horrific activity as dogfighting.

The descriptions of Michael Vick as an animal appear to be endless in the media coverage surrounding his trial, as one of his corporate sponsors becomes involved in the bashing of the former NFL star. In “Vick’s deal with Nike on shaky footing; ‘Concerned’ company puts shoe on hold,” Nike issues a public statement expressing its opinion regarding Michael Vick and the dogfighting charges. In addition to suspending the release of a new signature shoe called the Air Zoom Vick V, Nike explains that “we consider any cruelty to animals inhumane and abhorrent” (McCarthy, 2007, para. 4). Once again, Michael Vick is depicted as a callous and subhuman beast.

In a *St. Petersburg Times* article called “Nothing left but his cruel lies,” John Romano labels Vick as a “courageless animal,” a “dog without a heart,” and a “cur” (2007, para. 23). The terminology that is used here indicates that the author of this article considers Michael Vick to be on the same level as the dogs he killed. For Romano, torturing animals for monetary benefit is a ruthless and cowardly act that relegates Vick to the status of an animal. There are numerous examples of the media characterizing Michael Vick using animal language in articles surveyed for this study. In a *New York Times* article published in August of 2007, Vick’s actions are described as “cruel barbarism” (Vecsey, para. 15). Furthermore, *The Boston Globe* writes about Michael Vick as being charged with “an odious crime against civilized society” (Ryan, para. 12). Inherent in this statement is that the author, Bob Ryan, does not consider Vick to be a member of “civilized society.”

According to David Leonard’s article on colorblind rhetoric, the portrayal of Michael Vick as a primitive and subhuman beast is typical. The media, in their

efforts to describe Michael Vick, seem to be influenced by the color of this man's skin. Whether these individuals admit it or not, they are either subconsciously or consciously stereotyping Michael Vick with traditional Black characteristics. As Leonard's article elucidates, race exists as both a foundation and lens of understanding (2004). When looking at Michael Vick as a Black man accused of committing an atrocious crime, it becomes clear why he is depicted in certain ways. The media portray Vick as a wild, savage, brute, and animal, playing into those stereotypes reserved for African Americans who are accused of committing crimes. Describing Michael Vick in this particular way reiterates the fact that the media does not operate with a colorblind mentality; instead, the media resorts to racial stereotypes.

David Leonard notes in "The Next M.J. or the Next O.J.? Kobe Bryant, Race, and the Absurdity of Colorblind Rhetoric" that African American masculinity is often portrayed as "bad...deviant...physical...violent...diseased...and criminal" (2004, p. 300). In the case of Michael Vick, there are numerous instances of the media depicting this athlete as a cruel and callous criminal. In a 2007 article written in *The Washington Post*, Vick's alleged activities are described as "cruel, degrading and illegal" (Maske, 2007, para. 5). Furthermore, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell was quoted in *The New York Times* as saying that Michael Vick's actions were "cruel and reprehensible" (Zinser, 2008, para. 11). In the opening sentence of a *St. Petersburg Times* article called "Nothing left but his cruel lies," John Romano writes: "Cruelty was his hobby," when describing Michael Vick (2007, para. 1). Finally, *New York*

Daily News staff writer Dave Goldiner calls Vick “a poster boy for animal cruelty,” as Vick’s name has now become synonymous with animal abuse (2007, para. 4).

In addition to being labeled as a cruel and malicious human being, the media often refers to Michael Vick using various forms of the term “gruesome.” The *New York Daily News* describes “the gruesome underworld of dogfighting” (Red, 2007, para. 8). The *New York Times* comments on the indictment’s “grisly images of animal abuse,” as Michael Vick was forced to listen to prosecutors remind him of how he brutally tortured and killed innocent dogs (Sandomir, 2007, para. 17). The *Washington Times* published an article where one woman explained that “I hate dogfighting, it’s such a gruesome thing to do to an animal” (2007, para. 2). The media also depicted Michael Vick as a gruesome Black man who exhibited common stereotypes.

The media does not stop at the word “gruesome” when describing Michael Vick and his involvement in dogfighting. Instead, individuals who write for newspapers and magazines describe this man using a plethora of adjectives, depicting Vick in a negative light. In examining the media coverage of Michael Vick, there are many descriptive keywords and phrases that are used in order to portray Vick as a big Black monster. For example, in an August 21, 2007 *St. Petersburg Times* article, John Romano writes: “In his brazenness. In his *stupidity*. In his *proclivity* for *torture*. In his *shameless flaunting* of rules and laws” (para. 6). The words that are used to describe Michael Vick are carefully selected, extremely harsh, and serve a specific purpose.

As David Leonard explicates in his article on colorblind rhetoric, “race is present in every institution, every relationship, every individual” (2004, p. 287). Consequently, the media sees Michael Vick as an African American criminal, and it uses words to describe him as such. When talking about Vick as a “dog-torturing...deceptive... despicable...repugnant...loathsome” individual, the media is reaffirming Leonard’s notion that “colorblind rhetoric” is a myth. Leonard argues that colorblindness in contemporary American society does not exist.

Chapter Six

BRYANT: “ROOM SERVICE, PLEASE!”

This paper will now examine the case of Kobe Bryant, and how the media treated him differently than both Mike Tyson and Michael Vick.

Born on August 23, 1978 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Kobe Bryant was interested in basketball at an early age. His father, Joe “Jellybean” Bryant, had played professional basketball in both Europe and the NBA, and Kobe was determined to follow in his footsteps. Kobe excelled at both soccer and basketball as a young boy, and decided at age eleven that he was going to commit himself to pursuing a career in basketball (“Kobe Bryant Biography,” n.d.). Although his career began in the schoolyards of Philadelphia, this was just the beginning for the young and talented Kobe Bryant. As a junior at Lower Merion High School, Kobe averaged 31.1 points, 10.4 rebounds, and 5.2 assists and was named Pennsylvania Player of the Year (“Kobe Bryant Biography,” n.d.). Bryant successfully helped his high school team transition from the worst team in the league to the best, as the Aces of Lower Merion High School captured their first state title in forty-two years (“Kobe Bryant Biography,” n.d.). It was during his senior season that Kobe Bryant surpassed Wilt Chamberlain’s Pennsylvania high school scoring record, accumulating 2,883 points (“Kobe Bryant Biography,” n.d.). During this time, Bryant began to garner attention from college and professional scouts, who filled the stands in order to see the young phenom perform. Although Kobe Bryant had many college suitors, including Duke, North Carolina, Villanova, and Michigan, he was not interested in playing collegiate basketball (“Kobe Bryant Biography,” n.d.). For Kobe, turning professional and

playing in the NBA was naturally the next step for the young star, and he would not be denied in his efforts.

In 1996, eighteen year-old Kobe Bryant was drafted as the thirteenth overall pick by the Charlotte Hornets. Kobe's dream of becoming an NBA player, after years of hard work and dedication, had finally come true. The Los Angeles Lakers and general manager Jerry West had expressed extreme interest in Bryant, and West acquired him in a trade for Vlade Divac before the season started ("Kobe Bryant Biography," n.d.). It was not long before Kobe Bryant's impact was felt in the NBA, as he continued to amaze with his performance on the professional stage.

In his first full season, Bryant was named to the 1996-1997 NBA All-Rookie Second Team, averaging 7.6 points per game and 15.5 minutes per game in 71 games; in 1998, Kobe became the youngest All-Star in NBA history; in 1999, Bryant logged nine double-doubles and led the Lakers in scoring in eleven games; and in 2000, Kobe Bryant was selected to the NBA All-Defensive First Team ("Kobe Bryant Biography," n.d.). With each passing season, Kobe Bryant has been able to hone his skills in order to become one of the most dominant players in the NBA: he is a three-time NBA champion; eleven-time NBA All-Star; two-time NBA scoring champion; and one-time NBA most valuable player. As one of the most decorated stars in the game, it is not surprising to hear Kobe Bryant's name being mentioned amongst the all-time greats. There have been many comparisons made between Michael Jordan—undoubtedly the best shooting guard in the history of the NBA—and Kobe Bryant. On the court, Bryant seems to possess supernatural powers, dominating his opponents at will. Off of the court, however, Kobe Bryant's image was tainted by one incident

that occurred in 2003—an incident that many people suggest has demoted this NBA star from a God-like figure to mortal status.

On June 30, 2003, Kobe Bryant checked in to the Lodge and Spa at Cordillera in Edwards, Colorado, in preparation for arthroscopic surgery on his right knee. On July 1, the twenty-four year-old NBA star—who was a married man and father of a five month-old daughter at the time—invited the concierge who worked at the front desk of his hotel up to his room. Nineteen year-old Katelyn Faber consented, and accompanied Bryant to his suite, where he allegedly sexually assaulted her. In her report to police, Faber charged that Kobe Bryant “continually had one hand around my neck and with his other hand pushed me over to the side of the two chairs, turned me around and bent me over and lifted up my skirt” (Connor, 2004, para. 24). The woman declared that Bryant had nonconsensual sex with her from behind, and “was choking me to the point that I was scared” (Connor, 2004, para. 4).

On the day following the incident, the Eagle County District Attorney’s office filed a formal charge against Kobe Bryant for felony sexual assault. According to District Attorney Mark Hulbert, “it is alleged that he caused sexual penetration or intrusion, and he caused submission of the victim through actual physical force” (Tuchman & Cabell, 2003, para. 10). The charge against the three-time champion NBA megastar carried a sentence ranging anywhere from four years to life in prison or twenty years to life on probation, and a fine of up to \$750,000 dollars (Montaldo, n.d.). Although the woman who brought the charges believed that Bryant had physically violated her, Kobe Bryant was adamant in his denial of any wrongdoing: “I didn’t force her to do anything against her will...I’m innocent” (Tuchman and Cabell,

2003, para. 5). While Bryant acknowledged that he committed the sin of adultery in engaging in sexual relations with Faber, he viewed the charges of sexual assault as purely slanderous.

September 1, 2004 proved to be a significant day in the Kobe Bryant assault case, as the prosecution motioned to dismiss the charges against the Los Angeles Laker. Due to the fact that the plaintiff in the case refused to testify in court against Bryant, Judge Terry Ruckriegle had no choice but to dismiss the case. There have been a variety of reasons offered as to why Katelyn Faber decided not to testify against Bryant, whom she accused of raping her for ten minutes. There were reports that emerged, however, damaging the credibility of the nineteen year-old hotel employee; reports that branded her as a sexual deviant who engaged in another physical encounter with someone besides Kobe Bryant in between the alleged rape and her scheduled medical exam the following day (“Kobe’s Lawyers Introduce,” 2003). Although the rape charges against Bryant were dropped, his reputation seemed to be permanently damaged as a result of the media coverage surrounding the case and negative press that he received. Bryant’s endorsement deals with McDonald’s and Ferrero’s Nutella brand expired in 2003 and were not renewed (Badenhausen, 2004). Furthermore, Bryant’s accuser brought a civil suit against the multimillionaire, and he was forced to settle out of court for an undisclosed amount. Kobe Bryant, however, would eventually reestablish himself as one of the most likeable young men in the NBA, and his image would make an astounding recovery.

Although Kobe Bryant has worked arduously to become one of the greatest players of his generation, his reputation was tarnished by the events that occurred

during the summer of 2003. Due to one alleged incident, Kobe Bryant's image was permanently tainted. Since the sexual assault charges against one of the NBA's most dynamic players were dropped in late 2004, however, Kobe Bryant has dedicated himself to restoring his image. Although history has demonstrated that it is difficult for high-profile individuals to recover from criminal accusations, Kobe Bryant has proven that he has the power to defy all odds; after all, Bryant was the youngest player *ever* to appear in an NBA game, at eighteen years, two months, and eleven days old ("Kobe Bryant Biography," n.d.). If anyone could clean up this mess, Kobe Bryant could.

LexisNexis Academic was the database I used in order to gather my research on Kobe Bryant. I conducted a general search within all major U.S. and world publications from all available dates. I searched for articles using the keywords "Kobe Bryant rape," and was presented with 1,000 results. I read the titles of many of the articles in order to select artifacts that appeared to be most relevant to my topic. Finally, I selected 23 articles to analyze for the purposes of this paper.

Kobe's Comeback: It Began With The Press

Similar to the way in which this study analyzed press coverage of both Mike Tyson and Michael Vick, it will analyze media stories surrounding the Kobe Bryant case. Examining the press coverage from a rhetorical perspective, it becomes evident that the media treats Bryant much differently than it does both Tyson and Vick.

In "The Next M.J. or the Next O.J.? Kobe Bryant, Race, and the Absurdity of Colorblind Rhetoric," David Leonard's goal is to illustrate that American society does not submit to the utopian philosophy of colorblind rhetoric. Instead, Leonard argues

that society uses race as a lens for understanding. Furthermore, we are able to discern when individuals are employing their “racial lenses” by the way in which they speak or write about other people. David Leonard discusses, at length, how the dominant trend in American society is to characterize Black criminals in a particular way. Leonard explains to the reader how African American criminals are described in a stereotypical way that is said to be consistent with their race. While Whites are described as good, innocent, harmless people, Black criminals are described as impure, violent, and bad (2004). Through this analysis of the media coverage of the Kobe Bryant rape controversy, it becomes clear that he is assigned “White” characteristics.

David Leonard utilizes many positive words to describe White individuals in his framework article, and many of these are evident in the coverage of Kobe Bryant. Although there are instances of reporters describing Bryant using negative terminology, the majority of the words used to characterize the NBA star are optimistic in nature. In an article entitled “Lakers star is accused of sexual assault,” the author notes that Kobe Bryant was “co-operating with police and had voluntarily complied...” (“Lakers star is accused,” 2003, para. 4).

In an article from Canada’s *National Post*, Kobe Bryant is described by Lakers General Manager Mitch Kupchak as “one of the finest young men we’ve known...a wonderful asset” (Fortuna, 2003, para. 5). Although Bryant is accused of sexually assaulting a young woman, he is glorified as a respectable young man who does not seem capable of committing such a crime.

The Toronto Star published an article in July of 2003 that contained many positive words describing Kobe Bryant. First, Bryant is praised as “one of the league’s ambassadors,” for he has come to resemble everything that the NBA stands for (“No matter what,” 2003, para. 3). Bryant is then depicted as “a nice guy with no earrings and no tattoos and no criminal record” (“No matter what,” 2003, para. 4). In this statement, it is implied that having earrings, tattoos, or a criminal record inherently prevents someone from being “a nice guy.” Mike Tyson and Michael Vick were both culprits for having jewelry and tattoos—and thus they were not able to attain “nice guy” status. Kobe’s hairstyle is even worshipped in this article, as “his afro becomes a halo” (“No matter what,” 2003, para. 5). “Kobe Bryant is as close as any pro athlete can come to being perfect,” the article explains; he is “a handsome and charismatic” individual who will ultimately prevail in light of the sexual assault charges filed against him (“No matter what,” 2003, para. 11). The article concludes by noting that “in the end he won’t be a pariah” (“No matter what,” 2003, para. 23).

In a 2003 article published in *The Washington Post* called “The truth lies in the unknown,” Bryant is described using terminology traditionally associated with White characteristics. He is described as “just about the most likeable young man in the NBA,” and as someone who would not appear to be capable of committing such an atrocious crime as rape. The writer, Tony Kornheiser, contrasts Bryant with the fallen heavyweight boxer Mike Tyson, saying: “He is not Mike Tyson” (2003, para. 10). Although this is a brief statement, it is heavily loaded. To say that Kobe Bryant is not Mike Tyson is to say that he is not a criminal; it is to say that he is not a brute; it is to say that he is not a sexual deviant; it is not to say that he is innately bad.

Because Tyson is associated with everything that is “bad” and “Black,” Kobe Bryant must represent everything that is “good” and “White.” Kornheiser talks about the “mythology that has grown up around Bryant,” and how people regard him as “a great player” and “a winner” (2003, para. 12). Kornheiser describes Bryant as a “polite, well-dressed, conservative young man who isn’t covered in tattoos” (2003, para. 13). One again, pairing these words together indicates that body art is not considered to be representative of “polite, well-dressed, conservative young men.” Kornheiser praises Kobe Bryant, calling him “a goody-goody” (2003, para. 14). It appears that Tony Kornheiser and others overlook the charges of sexual assault raised against Kobe Bryant, because he is a nice man.

The Washington Times has many other positive things to say about Kobe Bryant, despite the NBA star being charged with rape. Deborah Simmons, in an August 2003 article, describes Bryant as someone who “appears not to live the thug life” (para. 6). Simmons writes that “Kobe would never sexually assault anyone because he doesn’t have to” (para. 8). In this statement, the question arises: Why would Kobe Bryant never have to sexually assault anyone? Is it because he is a good-looking, high-status professional basketball player who has a lot of money? Or, is it because Kobe Bryant is framed in White terms, and White people do not commit sexual assault?

There are those in the media who write about Kobe Bryant and how he has been vindicated following the sexual assault allegations. In an article from *Advertising Age* called “How Kobe got back in the game; NBA, Nike and Spalding banking on star again as his on-court 81 fuels his redemption,” Rich Thomaselli

comments on how Kobe Bryant has been able to reconstruct his image after being accused of rape. Thomaselli illustrates how Bryant has been able to achieve “a marketing makeover” and “emerge from marketing purgatory” (2006, para. 2). Due to his “good image” and his ability to generate attention on the basketball court, Kobe Bryant has successfully been able to salvage his career.

Kobe Bryant is not only described using positive language by the American press, but by media outlets all over the world. In Australia’s *The Sun Herald*, Bryant is pictured as “a superstar celebrated for his athletic skills and his wholesome off-court persona” (Wise & Markels, 2003, para. 1). The authors proceed to talk about Bryant’s “clean-cut image” and how he has “built a career free of significant controversy” (2003, para. 17). Kobe Bryant’s has had “a flawless reputation,” the authors state (2003, para. 20). It is interesting to note that Mike Wise and Alex Markels spend more time talking about all of the positive attributes of Kobe Bryant as opposed to the negative ones. While the fact remains that the case against Kobe Bryant has yet to be formally decided in a court of law when this article was written in July of 2003, the media already has him acquitted.

In a *New York Daily News* article, called “Bryant’s image facing a big test,” Christian Red describes Kobe Bryant in a very positive manner. Red talks about Kobe as “one of the most recognizable ad pitchmen in sports,” as the NBA star’s popularity has enabled him to work with many high-profile corporate sponsors (2003, para. 3). Red also comments on how Kobe Bryant “was largely considered to be the heir that would represent the NBA’s image and future” (para. 3). To become the heir to Michael Jordan—nicknamed “His Airness,” and arguably one of the greatest to

ever play professional basketball—is an extremely daunting task. However, according to Christian Red and other sports columnists, Kobe Bryant was the player that could assume that role. In the article, the author quotes Sonny Vaccaro, the founder of ABCD basketball camp and one of Kobe Bryant’s mentors. When asked to describe Bryant, Vaccaro says that “the Kobe Bryant I know is the nicest and most well-mannered kid I’ve ever met” (para. 9). It becomes evident that in discussions of Kobe Bryant, both the media and other people involved in the world of sports have nothing but positive things to say about the NBA player.

On September 3, 2004, *The New York Times* published an article entitled “End of Kobe Bryant case brings out strong sentiments,” in which Bryant is given more praise. William Scank, one of the potential jurors on the case, explains that “Kobe, I don’t think it hurt him at all. He came out smelling like a rose” (Madigan & Sink, para. 11). Although the case against Kobe Bryant is never brought to trial, Scank describes Bryant as if he were completely innocent. Whether Bryant committed the crime of rape is a debate that still remains open for questioning—what is an undeniable truth, however, is that Kobe Bryant committed the sin of adultery. Although Bryant cheated on his wife, Scank and others still think of him as emerging from the incident in 2004 with clean hands.

Chapter Seven CONCLUSION

In examining the individual cases of Mike Tyson, Michael Vick, and Kobe Bryant, the goal of this paper has been to “demonstrate the embedded nature of race within all public discourses” (Leonard, 2004, p. 292). Race becomes a central component of media discussions surrounding athletes accused of crimes, and the three professional athletes selected for this paper illustrate this fact. In analyzing the coverage of Tyson, Vick, and Bryant, it is evident that the media treats these three accused criminals differently. For both Mike Tyson and Michael Vick, the media employs highly stereotypical, negative language in their descriptions of the two athletes. Kobe Bryant, however, is described by the media using positive terminology, and is not portrayed as a criminal. While all three of these athletes have been accused of committing serious criminal offenses, the way in which they are represented in the media is distinctly different.

One of the factors influencing the media’s depictions of Tyson, Vick, and Bryant relates to the outcomes involving each of their respective criminal cases. In the rape trial of Mike Tyson, the heavyweight boxer was convicted and sentenced to six years in prison for his crime. Similarly, Michael Vick pled guilty to dogfighting charges and was sentenced to twenty-three months in federal prison as a result. In the case of Kobe Bryant however, the professional basketball player was never found guilty in the court of law for committing rape. Although Bryant was charged with sexually assaulting a Colorado woman in a hotel room, prosecutors dropped all of the charges after the plaintiff refused to testify in court. While Tyson and Vick were sent to prison for committing heinous crimes, Kobe Bryant was allowed to continue

playing in the NBA after being acquitted of all charges. Due to the convictions of Tyson and Vick and the acquittal of Bryant, the media may have viewed these three people very differently. Individuals who are convicted of crimes are often thought of as callous, evil, sinful people—whereas innocent people are regarded as pure and angelic. As a result, the media talks about Mike Tyson and Michael Vick using negative words, analogies, and metaphors, while it simultaneously extols the innocent Kobe Bryant.

Another potential explanation for the media's contrasting treatment of the Tyson, Vick, and Bryant cases relates to the physical appearance of these men. Mike Tyson is regarded as one of the fiercest competitors to ever have stepped into the boxing ring, and his physical appearance has a great deal to do with that. Tyson is a large physical specimen, weighing in at over two hundred pounds. His muscular body is covered in tattoos, and he has an intimidating public persona. Similar to Tyson, Michael Vick is a muscular, tattooed man whose physical appearance can be daunting to opponents. His dark pigmented skin coupled with his corn rows give Vick the impression of being an intimidating thug.

Kobe Bryant, compared next to Tyson and Vick, is physically very different. Although Bryant is African American, his skin tone is much lighter than both Tyson and Vick. Furthermore, Bryant has no earrings or tattoos, which preserves his image as a "clean-cut," more traditional looking man. It becomes apparent that both Tyson and Vick are characterized as physically dangerous to society, while Kobe Bryant is representative of America's golden boy. Therefore, the media uses words that are typically reserved for dangerous people in order to describe Mike Tyson and Michael

Vick. Kobe Bryant's physical appearance, however, enables the media to describe him using much more optimistic and encouraging terminology.

One possible reason for why the media treats Tyson, Vick, and Bryant differently is because of the sport each of them plays. Mike Tyson is heavyweight boxer, and his sport is centered around brutalizing one's opponent. Boxing is a sport that glorifies men and women who attack with ferocity. Sometimes, matches end with one individual on the brink of unconsciousness—that is boxing. Mike Tyson is a boxer who engages in this sport of physical assault and torture.

Michael Vick is also an athlete who participates in an extremely physical sport, playing the game of football. Football is a game where, once a week, twenty-two men face off in a sixty-minute battle. The reason the game is played only once a week is because it is physically damaging and exhausting. Players sacrifice their bodies each and every Sunday in order to help their team achieve victory. Michael Vick engages in a sport where players repeatedly run into each other at high speeds—football can be a ruthless game.

Kobe Bryant, compared to both Tyson and Vick, plays a sport that is relatively tame. Unlike boxing and football, basketball is not defined by the amount of physical contact that takes place. Basketball is a team sport that prioritizes skill and communication just as much as sheer physical ability. Basketball players come in all shapes and sizes, and one does not have to be tall, muscular, and physical to play in the NBA. It may be due to the nature of their sports that results in the media treating Tyson, Vick, and Bryant differently. While Tyson and Vick play physical

sports where hitting and abuse is acceptable, Kobe Bryant plays a much more “innocent” game.

While the aforementioned explanations may contribute to the media’s framing of Mike Tyson, Michael Vick, and Kobe Bryant, they have not been the focus of this paper. Instead, this paper has focused on the framework offered by David Leonard, in his article “The Next M.J. or the Next O.J.? Kobe Bryant, Race, and the Absurdity of Colorblind Rhetoric” (2004). In his article, Leonard argues that the notion of “colorblind rhetoric” is preposterous, and that race is an issue that infiltrates our everyday lives. Whether it is at a subconscious or conscious level, “race is always in play” (p. 290). Leonard suggests that in the media discussions of Black athletes accused of crime, there tends to be a stereotypical way in which they are judged. African American criminals are often described using words characteristic of the dominant White hegemonic imagination. For example, Leonard presents the example of Black males accused of being criminals as “hypersexual brutes...predators...deviant...criminal”—the list is seemingly endless (2004). The author reiterates the fact that the way in which these individuals are described is not merely coincidence—instead, it is because of their skin color that African Americans accused of crimes are portrayed in this light. Deviant Blacks are juxtaposed next to innocent Whites.

In David Leonard’s article, the point is strongly emphasized that Blacks are portrayed much differently by the media than Whites. While Blacks who are accused of committing crimes are described using negative language, Whites are described using positive language. In the media coverage surrounding the criminal cases of

Mike Tyson, Michael Vick, and Kobe Bryant, it becomes clear that the media has portrayed Bryant in terms that are often used to describe White athletes. Whether it is because he is found to be not guilty in a court of law; whether it is because of his appearance; whether it is because of his profession; or whether it is for any other reason, the media views Kobe Bryant as a White man in society. As David Leonard explains in “The Next M.J. or the Next O.J.? Kobe Bryant, Race, and the Absurdity of Colorblind Rhetoric,” there are certain ways in which the media treats African Americans, and there are other ways in which the media treats Caucasians. In the media coverage of Black athletes accused of committing crimes, stereotypical and racially infused language is used. However, in discussions of White individuals, the language becomes uplifting and optimistic. As exhibited in Appendix C, Kobe Bryant is typically described using positive terms. Mike Tyson and Michael Vick, however, are typically described using negative terms.

David Leonard’s article on the absurdity of colorblind rhetoric illuminates the fact that race continues to play a pivotal role in how we view people in this society. “The Next M.J. or the Next O.J.? Kobe Bryant, Race, and the Absurdity of Colorblind Rhetoric” is a testimony to the reality of how African Americans are positioned rhetorically. While Blacks are forced to endure the slanderous and stereotypical names assigned to them by the media, Whites are privileged enough to escape such embarrassment. While my research has focused mainly on three individual cases—that of Mike Tyson, Michael Vick, and Kobe Bryant—there is reason to believe that stereotyping in media coverage is pervasive. While this paper has focused on athletes accused of committing crimes, there is a much broader issue

involving media coverage that is cause for concern. The goal of this paper is not merely to expose the media and how it treats African American athletes accused of committing crimes; the focus of this paper is to show how the media is incapable of viewing individuals through an unprejudiced lens. As David Leonard's landmark article illuminates, colorblindness in American press coverage is a fallacy.

Consequently, it is our responsibility as educated media consumers to be cognizant of the fact that the media is not simply an impartial deliverer of facts and information; instead, the media is a biased institution that cannot help but to rely on stereotypes in order to inform its opinions of people.

APPENDIX AMike Tyson Keyword ListKey

Black	neutral term(s)
Red	negative term(s)
Green	positive term(s)

primitive behavior
troubled, talented boxer
rapist (4)
unremorseful (4)
crass (3)
intimidating force
expressionless (2)
looked like a beaten man
ruthless behavior
lewd, obscene, disrespectful behavior
good role model
disrespect and crude attitude
entitlement
special attention
intellectually limited and immature
convicted felon
powerful man
product of a system that glorifies athletes
overgrown brat
from world champion to inmate
Mike Tyson, the iron man
a changed man
flat and dejected
reckless
crude, uneducated ring waif
tattooed terror
big black rapist
self-destructing
pop culture icon
highly paid thug (3)
not a hero or a role model
a pitiful figure
baddest man on the planet
the rules don't apply to him
a flirt

APPENDIX B**Michael Vick Keyword List****Key**

Black	neutral term(s)
Red	negative term(s)
Green	positive term(s)

alleged activities are cruel, degrading, and illegal
executed dogs
pleading guilty
actions were cruel and reprehensible
Humane Society of the United States wished Vick's sentence was stiffer
president of the Humane Society said he was heartened that Vick took
responsibility
dogfighting is a sickening, barbaric, and criminal action
Falcons owner Arthur Blank: "maybe he'll have the opportunity to play again"
rising NFL star destined for the Hall of Fame is on trial
seemed to have everything going for him
fallen football star
in so much trouble that it transcends public relations
no magical spin elixir that can fix this
NFL wrong to suspend him
electrifying Atlanta quarterback once called "a Falcon for life"
gruesome underworld of dogfighting
a blood sport Vick financed and helped operate
three-time Pro Bowler's future in the NFL is uncertain
the NFL totally condemns the conduct
angry and disgusted
he should face the consequences of his actions, including a maximum prison
sentence
he should be thrown out of the NFL and banned from playing football forever
we must hold professional athletes accountable
athletes are too often placed on pedestals
tortures and slaughters domestic animals
a savage
menace to society
brutality exhibited
if Vick participated in dogfighting, he should be treated harshly by the judicial
system
exhibited subhuman characteristics
unworthy of redemption
we have overreacted to the Michael Vick scandal
I forgive Vick

he should be given another chance
indictment's grisly images of animal abuse
Nike: "any cruelty to animals is inhumane and abhorrent"
Michael Vick is no hero
gruesome thing to do to an animal
got what he deserved
easy target because of his notoriety
poster boy for animal cruelty
cruelty was his hobby
the ruin of Michael Vick
took pleasure; lacking compassion or pity
in his brazenness, stupidity, proclivity for torture, shameless flaunting of rules
and laws
most spectacular fall from grace we have seen in sports
radioactive
showed no sense of remorse of responsibility
image tarnished
arrogant
deception
no character, integrity, or gallantry
a dog without a heart
courageless animal
a cur
financed the vicious death machine out in the woods
dog-torturing quarterback
dogfighting is cruel barbarism
gruesome activity
despicable acts
utterly repugnant
bad judgment
charged with an odious crime against civilized society
participant in a horrific act
accused of a loathsome crime
Vick's image has taken the big hit
issued a mea culpa
Vick fell short
from an Atlanta Falcon to a fallen sparrow
dumb, greedy, imprudent
bottom-of-the-barrel, bad-apple status
a good guy who has made a lot of mistakes

APPENDIX CKobe Bryant Keyword ListKey

Black	neutral term(s)
Red	negative term(s)
Green	positive term(s)

cooperative (2)
 out of character
 one of the finest young men
 wonderful asset
 one of the league's ambassadors
 nice guy
 no earrings, no tattoos, no criminal record (2)
 an angel
 Kobe's afro became a halo
 close to being perfect
 shattered public image
 permanent damage to reputation
 handsome
 charismatic
 won't be a pariah in the end
 will take a great fall if guilty
 most likeable young man in the NBA
 Bryant admitted to adultery
 he is not Mike Tyson
 a mythology has grown up around Bryant
 a great player
 a winner
 polite
 dresses well
 nice, respectful, earnest
 goody-goody
 a star (2)
 appears not to live the thug life
 Kobe would never sexually assault anyone
 untouchable (not in a good way)
 MVP
 re-establishing himself
 smart guy, a pretty genuine guy
 shunned by advertising world
 emerging from marketing purgatory
 arguably the greatest player in the game today

always had a good reputation
tarnished (4)
tainted for the short term
alleged assailant
wholesome off-court persona
he is not a criminal
clean-cut image, a career free of significant controversy
once-flawless reputation
questioning Bryant's wholesome image
one of the most recognizable pitchers in sports
an heir to Michael Jordan
nicest and most well-mannered kid
before, Kobe had a sterling reputation
his image will suffer regardless of verdict
Kobe came out smelling like a rose
credibility as a basketball player never hurt-still a fabulous player
terrible husband
from rape allegation to MVP and good guy again
the collapse of Kobe
he was the center of the Laker's universe
fall from grace
popularity has plummeted (2)
a disenchanted public
issued a mea culpa
formerly the Lakers most glorified icon
inner circle collapsed, cut off
was renowned for his dedication
no longer a media darling
Bryant left with a bad reputation
nobody likes him, he's a means to an end
arrogant, aloof, intensely stubborn
ill perceptions, bad teammate, difficult personality
Kobe's going to do the right thing
centerpiece of new-look USA team
prominent sports star
Lakers superstar charged with sexual assault
prior unblemished career
Kobe thought you can order up a woman like you can chicken wings
tried by the American public and convicted

REFERENCES

- AP. (1992, March 27). Mike Tyson jailed six years judge refuses bail , fears boxer capable of rape again if freed. *The Toronto Star*, pp. A3.
- Badenhausen, K. (2004, September 3). Kobe Bryant's sponsorship will rebound. Retrieved May 5, 2009, from forbes.com Web site:
http://www.forbes.com/2004/09/03/cz_kb_0903kobe.html.
- Brady, J. (1997, August 11). Once sports gave us heroes, not heartaches and head cases. *Advertising Age*, 68 (32).
- Briggs, B. (2007, July 18). NFL megastar Vick's endorsements in danger. Retrieved May 5, 2009, from msnbc.com Web site:
<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/19834805/>.
- Connor, T. (2004, October 2). Kobe choked and raped, she said: Accuser's first words to police describe harrowing ordeal. Retrieved May 5, 2009, from nydailynews.com Web site:
http://www.nydailynews.com/archives/news/2004/10/02/2004-10-02_kobe_choked___raped__she_sai.html.
- Correspondent, N. (1994, June 13). Mike Tyson's appeal denied in Indianapolis. *CNN*.
- E-mail:, G. V. (2007, August 21). Vick gambled with career, and lost. *The New York Times*, pp. 1.
- E-mail:, R. S. (2007, August 1). In endorsements, no athlete is a sure thing. *The New York Times*, pp. 5.
- Emerling, G., & Times, t. W. (2007, December 11). Public divided on Vick sentence some scorn, others applaud punishment. *The Washington Times*.
- Fortuna, N. (2003, July 7). Bryant charged with sex assault: Turns himself in to police: Woman in Colorado accuses L.A. Laker of sexual misconduct. *National Post (Canada)*, p. S1.
- Game stats. (2006). Retrieved May 5, 2009, from National Coalition Against Violent Athletes Web site: <http://www.ncava.org/stats.html>.
- Gianoulis, T. Mike Tyson. Retrieved May 5, 2009, from St. James Encyclopedia of Pop Culture Web site:
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_g1epc/is_bio/ai_2419201235/.

- Indiana court upholds Tyson rape conviction. (1993, August 23). Retrieved May 5, 2009, from encyclopedia.com Web site:
<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G1-14301524.html>.
- It would be 'criminal' to allow Vick back into the NFL.(2007, August 24). *USA TODAY*, pp. 12A.
- Kobe Bryant biography. Retrieved May 5, 2009, from kobe Bryant live.com Web site:
<http://www.kobe Bryant live.com/kobe-bryant-biography.php>.
- Kobe's lawyers introduce 'compelling evidence'. (2003, October 15). Retrieved May 5, 2009, from FOXNews.com Web site:
<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,100131,00.html>.
- Kornheiser, T. (2003, July 19). The truth lies in the unknown. *The Washington Post*, p. D01.
- Lakers star is accused of sexual assault. (2003, July 7). *The Evening Standard (London)*, p. A.
- Lapchick, R. E. (2000). Crime and athletes: New Racial stereotypes. *Society*. 37, 14-20.
- Leonard, D. J. (2004). The next M.J. or the next O.J.? Kobe Bryant, race, and the absurdity of colorblind rhetoric. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*. 28, 284-313.
- Madigan, N. & Sink, M. (2004, September 3). End of Kobe Bryant case brings out strong sentiments. *The New York Times*, p. A1.
- Maske, M., & Writer, W. P. S. (2007, July 18). Falcons' Vick indicted in dogfighting case; star QB alleged to have been highly involved. *The Washington Post*, pp. E01.
- McCarthy, M. (2007, July 20). Vick's deal with Nike on shaky footing ; 'concerned' company puts shoe on hold. *USA Today*, pp. 1C.
- McKay, J. & Smith, P. (1995). Exonerating the hero: Frames and narratives in media coverage of the O.J. Simpson story. *Media International Australia*. 75.
- Michael Vick biography. (2008). Retrieved May 5, 2009, from jockbio.com Web site:
http://www.jockbio.com/Bios/Vick/Vick_bio.html.
- Mike Tyson biography. Retrieved May 5, 2009, from bookrags.com Web site:
<http://www.bookrags.com/biography/mike-tyson-cri/>.

Mike Tyson charged with rape ; violence in sports examined. *CBS News Transcripts*.

Mike Tyson quotes. Retrieved May 5, 2009, from tripod.com Web site:
<http://kjkolb.tripod.com/homepage/miketysonquotes.html>.

Mike Tyson rap sheet. Retrieved May 5, 2009, from cbcsports.ca Web site:
<http://www.cbc.ca/sports/story/2002/01/30/tyson-crime020130.html>.

Montaldo, C. The Kobe Bryant case: Background and the latest developments.
Retrieved May 5, 2009, from crime.about.com Web site:
<http://crime.about.com/od/current/a/kobe.htm>.

NBC news poll: 10 years after Simpson verdict. (2004, June 6). Retrieved May 5,
2009, from msnbc.com Web site: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5139346/>.

No matter what, Kobe's going to be okay. (2003, July 29). *The Toronto Star*, p. C07.

O'Hear, M. M. (2001). Symposium: Blue-collar crimes/white-collar criminals:
Sentencing elite athletes who commit violent crimes. *Marquette Sports Law
Review*.

Red, C. (2003, July 8). Bryant's image facing a big test. *Daily News (New York)*, p.
76.

Reuters, W. F.,. (2007, August 28). Fallen falcon Vick pleads guilty, apologizes;
'dogfighting is a terrible thing and I do reject it. I will redeem myself. I have
to,' disgraced QB says. *The Gazette (Montreal)*, pp. C1.

Robinson, L. N. (1997). Professional athletes-held to a higher standard and above the
law: A comment on high-profile criminal defendants and the need for states to
establish high-profile courts. *Indiana Law Journal* . 73, 1314-1351.

Romano, J. (2007, August 21). Nothing left but his cruel lies. *St.Petersburg Times
(Florida)*, pp. 1C.

Ryan, B. (2007, July 19). Vick accusations sickening. *The Boston Globe*, pp. C1.

Saraceno, J. (1992, February 10). Boxer says he made intentions known. *USA
TODAY*, pp. 6C.

Saraceno, J. (1992, February 11). Tyson convicted on all counts. *USA TODAY*, pp.
1C.

Saraceno, J. (1992, February 11). Tyson guilty on all counts. *USA TODAY*, pp. 1C.

- Simmons, D. (2003, August 8). No means no; except in Kobe Bryant's case. *The Washington Times*, p. A19.
- Staffo, D. F. (2001). Strategies for reducing criminal violence among athletes. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance*. 72, 39-42.
- Tapper, J. & Taylor, A. (2006, April 18). Is jock culture a training ground for crime?. Retrieved May 5, 2009, from abcnews.com Web site: <http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/story?id=1857059&page=1>.
- Terilli, S. & Sigman, S. & Driscoll, P. (2007). Lowering the bar: Privileged court filings as substitutes for press releases in the court of public opinion. *Communication Law and Policy*. 12.
- The Mike Tyson case. (1992, February 22). *The Washington Post*.
- The O.J. Simpson trial: Opinion polls. (1995, October 3). Retrieved May 5, 2009, from umkc.edu Web site: <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/Simpson/polls.html>.
- Thomaselli, R. (2006, January 30). How Kobe got back in the game; NBA, Nike and Spalding banking on star again as his on-court 81 fuels his redemption. *Advertising Age*, 3.
- Tuchman, G. & Cabell, B. (2003, December 16). Kobe Bryant charged with sexual assault. Retrieved May 5, 2009, from CNN.com Web site: <http://www.cnn.com/2003/LAW/07/18/kobe.bryant/index.html>.
- Valen, C. (2009, January 17). Athletes and crime. Retrieved May 5, 2009, from Crimespace Web site: <http://crimespace.ning.com/profiles/blogs/athletes-and-crime>.
- Waxman, S. (2004). When heroes go bad: The co-dependence of Mike Tyson and the press. *Columbia Journalism Review*, 61-62.
- Wise, M. & Markels, A. (2003, July 20). Kobe: I'm no rapist; basketball Colorado Lakers star Bryant says he cheated but denies sexual assault charge. *The Sun Herald (Sydney, Australia)*, p. 110.
- Writer, Christian Red Daily News Staff. (2007, August 21). Vick 'fesses up. superstar NFL QB cops plea to vile dogfighting rap. *Daily News (New York)*, pp. 4.
- Writer, Corky Siemaszko Daily News Staff. (2003, May 29). Tyson talking hate rape says he'd like to attack beauty queen & mom. *Daily News (New York)*.

Writer, Dave Goldiner Daily News Staff. (2007, August 28). I FOUND JESUS : VICK but the 'sorry' star will lose his freedom after finally admitting to twisted dogfighting charges. *Daily News (New York)*, pp. 7.

Zinser, L. (2008, November 26). Vick clears the way to a possible early release. *The New York Times*, pp. 14.

SUPPLEMENTAL SOURCES

MIKE TYSON:

- Athletes in trouble. (1991, September 11). *The Gazette (Montreal, Quebec)*, p. F1.
- Carey, J. (1992, August 13). Tyson case. *USA TODAY*, p. 1C.
- Dodd, M. (1992, February 12). The verdict 'Sad case' but encouraging. *USA TODAY*, p. 1A.
- Farber, M. (1992, March 27). Tyson still doesn't get it; he may not understand rape even when he's fighting again. *The Gazette (Montreal, Quebec)*, p. C1.
- Flock, J.(Bureau Chief-Correspondent). (1992, March 26). *Mike Tyson convicted of rape; sentenced to 6 years* [Television series episode]. CNN.
- Grass, J. (1992, January 27). Rape conviction would end career. *USA TODAY*, p. 9C.
- Johnson, P. & Donion, B. & Graham, J. (1992, February 3). NBC News names Tyson's rape accuser. *USA TODAY*, p. 3D.
- Lee, S. (1992, February 12). I'm not sorry, says Tyson, the rapist. *Herald Sun*.
- Lee, S. (1992, February 22). I'd have dropped charges for apology: Rape victim \$1m Tyson; bribe claim. *The Advertiser*.
- McDonough, M. (1992, February 11). Shaming of Mike Tyson; guilty of rape, he faces years behind bars. *Evening Standard (London)*, p. 1.
- Moore, D. L. (1991, August 27). Athletes and rape: Alarming link. *USA TODAY*, p. 1C.
- Neuharth, A. (1992, February 14). A heartland lesson for New York brat. *USA TODAY*, p. 7A.
- Tyson indicted on rape charge. (1991, September 10). *The Gazette (Montreal, Quebec)*, p. E1.
- Why Mike Tyson must take the rap for rape. (1992, August 16). *The Sunday Times (London)*.
- Woodward, S. (1991, September 12). Tyson gets first day in court // Boxer out on \$30,000 bail; Jan. 27 trial set. *USA Today*, p. 1C.

MICHAEL VICK:

Alleged dogfighting brings shame to NFL. (2007, June 6). *USA TODAY*, p. 12A.

Another sponsor dumps Vick. (2007, August 1). *The Globe and Mail (Canada)*, p. S5.

Capehart, J. (2007, August 29). Michael Vick's self-defeat. *The Washington Post*, p. A17.

Chufu, V. G. (2007, October 1). Vick's dog act- NFL star faces five years' jail. *The Courier Mail (Australia)*, p. 74.

If Vick is guilty of dogfighting charges, he should lose his job. (2007, July 24). *USA TODAY*, p. 10A.

Mihoces, G. (2007, August 28). What now?; with Vick guilty plea, a star, his team and the league feel the effects. *USA TODAY*, p. 1C.

Punishing Michael Vick for a lifetime fuels recidivism. (2007, August 29). *USA TODAY*, p. 12A.

We likely haven't seen the last of Vick. (2007, August 27). *The Toronto Star*, p. S01.

Youngmisuk, O. (2007, May 20). Bad to the bone. Michael Vick's rep getting sacked over dogfighting rap. *Daily News (New York)*, p. 86.

KOBE BRYANT:

Arthur, B. (2004, September 2). Kobe sex charge dropped: Civil suit continues: Accuser decided she won't testify in sexual assault case. *National Post (Canada)*, p. S1.

Beck, H. (2004, December 17). The collapse of Kobe. *The New York Times*, p. D1.

Bryant, accuser reach civil suit settlement: ABC News report. (2005, March 2). *National Post (Canada)*, p. S5.

Bryant to be USA centerpiece. (2006, March 6). *The Toronto Sun*, p. S17.

Connor, T. (2004, August 22). To trail or not in Kobe case. *Daily News (New York)*, p. 7.

Jones, T. (2008, May 12). Best recovery. *St. Petersburg Times (Florida)*, p. 1C.

Lemke, T. (2008, May 13). Kobe's sitting pretty; five years after rape charges, Bryant again becomes an appealing endorser. *The Washington Times*, p. C01.

Lupica, M. (2003, August 7). All alone in a hostile arena. *Daily News (New York)*, p. 6.

Luzadder, D. (2003, July 21). Kobe's accuser overdosed: Pal may affect credibility. *Daily News (New York)*, p. 3.

Luzadder, D. (2004, May 12). Kobe airs a plea- 'not guilty'. *Daily News (New York)*, p. 2.

Martzke, R. (2003, July 21). Bryant coverage is plentiful- and look for lots more. *USA TODAY*, p. 2C.

Nance, R. (2004, September 2). Bryant damaged as endorser. *USA TODAY*, p. 1C.

Papps, N. (2004, September 3). Rape charges dropped; basketball star sorry for sex act. *The Advertiser*, p. 25.

Tyson offers Kobe support. (2003, August 26). *The Toronto Sun*, p. 32.